

BANTHA TRACKS



NEWSLETTER OF THE OFFICIAL STAR WARS FAN CLUB

INTERVIEW: HARRISON FORD

On 18 October, we went to Harrison Ford's home in the hills above Los Angeles. During our conversation, we discussed his start in motion pictures, his feelings towards his associates on Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back, and his hopes for the future. Below are excerpts from that conversation.

SW How much acting had you done before *Star Wars*?

HF I had done very little stage work. I had done a season in summer stock and one or two plays after that. That was my total stage experience. In the 7, or 8 or 10 years I had been in the business before I did *Star Wars*, I had done mostly TV, some film, but I had been in about six pictures, had done quite a bit of TV. I stopped doing TV before I started to do *Star Wars*, because I was afraid I'd use up my welcome, and get type-cast in the same kind of role I was always being offered on TV.

SW What kind of role was that?

HF I was either the sensitive brother, or the bank-robbing brother, or the business brother, or any kind of sensitive brother. Or the guy that didn't do it - the guy they think at the beginning did it. In TV it works this way, they have the scene at the beginning where they think you did it, they come and accuse you, you say, "I didn't do it", they go away, then they come back just before the first commercial and say "tell us the story again". You tell'em a little bit and say "Honest to God, I didn't do it" and then they have a commercial. They come back to you, until the end, and they say "you didn't do it".

SW You did *American Graffiti* for George Lucas, playing the role of Bob Falfa. Did he call you again for *Star Wars*, or how did you get the 'Han Solo' part.

HF I made no effort because George had let it be known to the agents that he wasn't going to use anybody he'd used in *American Graffiti*. So I didn't think about it. I didn't enter into the picture until about 3 or 4 weeks before they were due to make the decision. I was asked to do a video tape test, which I did, and then they asked me to help them with other people's video tape test... It seems like I must have done 75. Then I was told they wanted me to do the part, and that was it. I didn't even have a script.

SW When you made *Star Wars*, what did you think of the film and the part you were taking?

HF I thought it was real good part - the character was humorous, and I thought that those things that weren't exactly funny in the script, probably would be - I thought it was going to be funny. I didn't think it was going to have such a wide audience, it was just a good part for me! I never tried to judge whether this was going to be successful or whether people would like it. For me, it was a simple opportunity to play a character that I knew the audience would like. It was the first time a character I had played was so important to the film. It was necessary that this character worked, as necessary for them as it was for me - so, that opens up a kind of atmosphere, a good environment for collaboration.

MM How did you actually get into movies?

HF When I first came out here I wanted to be in movies, I came out here to be in movies, but I didn't even know what the names of the major motion picture studios were. We stopped in Laguna Beach where we saw the ocean for the first time and rented an apartment. It was close enough to Los Angeles to get a little grubstake. We had taken a month to go across the country, so it was a good rest spot. I did a play in Laguna Beach, *John Brown's Body*, and somebody, a man named E.M. Bernard who was doing the music to that play, was also doing the music for *Laugh-In* and had some link to Columbia Pictures. He asked me if I would like to meet the guy who was head of casting for Columbia. I said "sure, why not" - it was the first time I had ever been in a movie studio. I went in to this huge paneled



office, and there was this guy talking on two phones, and another guy behind him on another two phones, literally, and I sat in a straight-back chair for about 10 minutes while they talked big bucks, big names. They kept switching from one phone to another, covering one mouthpiece, then the other mouthpiece, and shouting back and forth - just like in the movies. You know, I thought they were probably doing it for my benefit - I couldn't imagine how life could so imitate the movies. But sure enough, it was for real and finally the first guy finishes up and turns to me and says "What's your name?". I said, "Harrison Ford". He said, "Who sent you?" I said, "E.M. Bernard". He asks the guy behind him who E.M. Bernard was and the other guy says, "Never heard of him." He said "How tall are you?" "6'1, 6'0" How much ya weigh?" "190" - now he's giving me a little 3 x 5 card to put the information on. "Do you ride a horse?" "Any other special hobbies, talents, etc." Finally, "thanks, we'll see ya!" I walked out, went down the hall to the elevators, realized I had to use the bathroom. I went to the bathroom, and when I came out, his assistant is coming down the hall, saying to me, "Come back, he wants to talk to you." If I'd gone on the elevator, I would have been gone and nobody would have bothered to chase me. When I went back, the first thing the guy says is "How'd you like to be on a contract?" I said, "How much?" The guy says "7-year contract for \$150/week." It wasn't great, but it was my introduction. I

had been in California for six months, I wanted to be an actor, and all of a sudden, I 'were' one. I was working as a carpenter most of the time, and was only given occasional acting jobs that I thought would put me in good stead, career-wise. I just wanted to be in good movies – I didn't care if I did small parts, as long as good movies. I figured that would be the best way for me to learn to act, since being in bad movies didn't teach you much except to be calm under fire . . . that's only the first step. It's nice to be in good movies, work with good people. So that's what I decided to do, figuring that nobody would realize that I wasn't making very much money, and they'd just see me occasionally in a good movie. I would be paying my dues, biding my time, putting food on the table in a less demeaning way than was available to me in acting. I also would begin to be something other than an out-of-work actor, which was great. There's nothing wrong with being an out-of-work actor, but if it's the only thing that's happening in your life, you begin to accept that as what you are, as a definition of what you do. You make a much more attractive employee if you have something else going on other than "me", which is usually judged to be an embarrassment.

SW Is science fiction a genre you were familiar with prior to this?

HF No experience with it, but I didn't find it any problem to imagine it. I was always keyed into the human context of the relationship. It wasn't as apparent to some audiences as it was to me that that was an important element. But that doesn't matter. It's a necessary foundation for fantasy to have some approach to it, some way of keying yourself into it, some accessible characters. But it's a very skillful conception, and I found it no trouble to deal with.

SW How would you compare that with your work on *Empire*?

HF The first one was a cakewalk compared to the second one. The second one was much more difficult.

SW Was that because of the story, or the people involved, or what?

HF The relationships become more significant, the points that need to be brought across become more subtle. The first time, a great deal of energy was expended to establish a context for a relatively small story - heavily plotted, really articulately contrived, very fast moving with lots and lots of information, and all kinds of things having to be established. It took a lot of energy and a lot of time, but the second time you come back, all of that is done for you. You can pretty much think that everyone who will see the second one, has seen the first one. So they know who they are dealing with and you just walk on and start doing the story. But I think it had to be a lot more interesting than the first one, because people were aware of who you were and what you were doing, they got a chance to look at you a little closer. You had to bear up under the scrutiny. It had to be more complex. The characterizations had to be more complex. I felt a sense of responsibility for making it better. I mean you get a chance to do it over again – the only reason to do it is to do it better. If you can't do it better, it's boring. My part was more interesting this time, so I enjoyed myself a lot more this time. The first time was a lot of fun, but this time I enjoyed the work, even though it was more difficult.

SW How would you compare the two directors, George Lucas and Irv Kershner?

HF The difference in directors was no problem. Each director brought different qualities to the same circumstances. George worked more simply, as was appropriate under the circumstances. I think it was a more agonizing task for Kershner. Because of the success of the first one, responsibilities encumbered in making the second one were far greater. I think he did a good job.

SW What was it like filming in Norway?

HF Cold and slow. I hadn't anticipated being there at all. My snow scenes were supposed to be shot on at the sound stage at the studio. I had just arrived in England as they left for Norway, and in no time at all, found myself whisked away to join them in Norway with no preparation, wearing a costume built for conditions on the stage. Another one of those bizarre experiences in life. It wasn't as bad for the actors as it was for the crew. They were incredibly tough – that English crew. Our shelter was the back of snowmobiles and such, and were never able to reach the base camp which they'd established on the glacier because of the weather.

SW What do you see for yourself for the future, in terms of roles and career?

HF I'd just like to continue doing interesting work. I don't have much of a forward view. I don't anticipate the future too much. Right now I'm enjoying a rest. I don't know what's going to be available when I'm rested and so I don't equip myself with any kind of predisposition, that could as well be disappointed as not. I don't think about that at all. I would like to do what I'm doing for as long as I can make a living at it and not go totally bats. That's my ambition.

EMPIRE PROGRESS REPORT

In mid-September, principal photography on *The Empire Strikes Back* was completed at the EMI-Elstree Studios outside of London. The Millennium Falcon was dismantled and placed in storage to await its resurrection in *Star Wars III*. The Ice Cave and Bespin, the cloud city, are now gone. But they will live again when *The Empire Strikes Back* opens nationwide on May 21, 1980. All the actors are home now and resting, after a grueling five-month shooting schedule. Mark Hamill is spending time with his wife and new-born son. Harrison Ford is remodeling his home in Beverly Hills. Carrie Fisher is once again before the cameras, this time appearing in *The Blues Brother Movie* for director John Landis. Billy Dee Williams is involved in various projects. All will soon be preparing for extensive personal appearance tours on *Empire* beginning early next year. Information on these appearances will be announced in future issues of *Bantha Tracks* when it becomes available.

At the Industrial Light and Magic facility in Northern California, Brian Johnson and his talented special effects crew are working hard in order to complete the staggering number of effects called for in the script. Far more individual elements, such as matte paintings, stop-motion animation, and miniatures, will be required for *Empire* than were used in *Star Wars*. Harrison Ellenshaw, fresh from his work on Walt Disney's *The Black Hole*, is once again handling the matte paintings. John Berg and Phil Tippet, who animated the wonderful chess game sequence in *Star Wars*, are performing the numerous stop-motion animation chores. Model makers are busily building spaceships, based on old and new designs by Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston. When satisfied with the look of the ships, they are turned over to Director of Photography, Richard Edlund, for filming in front of the mammoth *blue screen* with the specially built Empireflex camera. After filming and optical processing, the film is turned over to Editor Paul Hirsch to intercut with the live action footage.

Meanwhile, other departments continue unabated in their work. John Williams is preparing to conduct his new score for *The Empire Strikes Back* with the London Symphony Orchestra, during December and January. Over in publicity, an exciting ad campaign is being created.

Overseeing it all are Director Irvin Kershner, whose job was far from over when principal production was completed, and Executive Producer George Lucas, making sure that every phase of production keeps to his vision for the entire twelve part saga.

In the next issue of *Bantha Tracks*, we'll have another update on *The Empire Strikes Back* as it moves toward completion.

JAPANESE INFLUENCES IN STAR WARS

by Nikki White

Article by Nikki White, originally published in issue number 3 of *Skywalker*, a Star Wars fanzine. *Skywalker* is published by Bev Clark; 1950 Cooley Avenue; Apartment 5306; Palo Alto CA 94303.

Much has been written about the various influences at work in *Star Wars*, most particularly those of western and *Flash Gordon*. However, there are other elements, perhaps less obvious but equally as strong, and it is one of these I propose to examine in order to restore the balance. For there is most definitely a Japanese element in the film, chiefly derived from the Japanese cinema but also from some aspects of their culture as history and religion.

Probably the most obvious example of this influence is the character of Obi-wan Kenobi. Even his name suggests a Japanese name, without actually being one. Lucas has stated in various places that he modeled both Kenobi and the Jedi on the Samurai. The Samurai, however, were not an order of knighthood like the Jedi or their European counterparts, but they did have a code of behavior, and they did carry a sword as a formal weapon, disdaining guns (brought to Japan in the early 16th century by the Dutch and Portuguese and later made on the island of Tanegashima; hence the early word for a gun, *tanegashima*). They were proud of their fighting skills, especially with the sword, which was the mark of their class; no one else was permitted to wear the two swords, one short and one long. As the Jedi were pledged to protect and defend the Senate and the Republic, so the Samurai were bound to defend their feudal lords above and beyond all else. Like the Jedi, the Samurai of popular legend and fiction was a righter of wrongs and defender of the oppressed. This type of hero – whatever the reality of the true Samurai of history – can be found in mass literature from the kabuki plays to historical romances to movies and television.



Lucas has also said that Obi-wan was modeled after some of the characters portrayed by Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune. In fact, he originally wanted Mifune for the role but was vetoed by Fox (*Shukan Asahi*, 24th March, 1978, p. 41). A most typical example of a Mifune role would be the general in *Hidden Fortress* who brings his princess-in-disguise to safety after her clan is defeated in a civil war. The plot resembles that of *Star Wars* in other ways. For instance, the general is hindered and helped by two peasants who are much like the two droids in their bickering and interdependence, and also much like Han Solo in their interest in the reward promised for their efforts. This general is worldly-wise and is a skilled warrior who can be ruthless, if necessary, just like Obi-wan. He is also in disguise and is not what he appears to be, much as Obi-wan looks like a desert scavenger or an overgrown Jawa in his brown outer robe and hood but is really a Jedi.

A good many of Mifune's characters are like that – warriors whose outer appearance and manner belie their skill. Another such is the scruffy master swordsman, Sanjuro, of the films

Yojimbo and *Sanjuro*. Sanjuro is a *ronin*, a masterless Samurai, and so, in a sense, is Obi-wan. For he is just as displaced and without identity and status after the destruction of the Jedi as any Samurai who has lost his clan, his lord, and his class.

But Obi-wan is wiser than most of these characters, more mystical, so that the resemblance is more in the sword skill and the air of having been around and knowing life. Sanjuro does play mentor to nine Skywalker-like boy Samurai in *Sanjuro*, but it is another character entirely who shows the true wisdom of the film in advising that while one may own a sword, one should not use it, but should keep it clean in its scabbard. "But swords, you know," she says, "really good ones, should be kept in their scabbards and not used at all." Sanjuro is like a sword without a scabbard in here view. Besides which, for cynicism and roughness of speech and manner, Sanjuro makes even Han Solo look like Pollyanna.

Another obvious influence is some of the costumes. Princess Leia's double buns and flowing white robes can be seen on members of both sexes in pictures of Shotoku Taishi and his attendants, who lived during the 7th century, and in representations of the people of the Yayoi and Yamato periods, approximately 8 A.D. to 8th century. Lucas originally wanted a Japanese girl to play Leia, according to Charles Lippincott, quoted in *Shukan Asahi* (24 March, 1978, p. 41). Obi-wan wears a kimono and Luke a judo suit. Darth Vader's helmet is modeled on those of medieval Japanese warriors, and his appearance is intended to suggest an armored Samurai of the Warring States period. Lucas, we are told, had in mind the Kurosawa film *Throne of Blood* (also starring Mifune).

Equally obvious is the sword play, coming as it does straight from the ever-popular *chambara* or swordfight picture, which at present seems to be re-emerging after a period of neglect, with release this year of two new films with prestigious casts. The fact that the light sabre is a two-handed weapon like the Samurai sword and has a similar importance or mystique attached to it adds to the impression that the sword play is based on Japanese models. The duelists in the famous light sabre fight on the Death Star move like Japanese swordsmen, though they retain the European tradition of chatting with one's opponent rather than screaming at him. In the equally famous cantina sequence, Kenobi's swift drawing of his sword and neat dispatch of his opponents, finishing with him posed in a swordsman's stance, then slowly straightening and putting away his weapon, is very reminiscent of the final duel in *Sanjuro*.

In fact, the cantina scene very much recalls in atmosphere parts of *Yojimbo*. In the latter case, it is not a cantina, but a whole town which makes Mos Eisley look like a garden city by comparison. This town is run by gangsters and peopled by human oddities, every bit as peculiar as any in that spaceport bar, all very much qualifying for Obi-Wan's label of *scum and villainy*. Sanjuro is confronted by one group, one of whom says, "See this tattoo? I wasn't in prison for nothing." Another says, "The law's after me. I'll hang if they catch me." Another claims, "Me too! Me too! They'll cut off my head!" And yet another chirps in with, "There's nothing bad I haven't done." Compare this with, "I've got the death sentence on 12 systems!" The confrontation is resolved in exactly the same way as that in the cantina in *Star Wars* – lightning swordplay by Sanjuro, leaving one 'baddie' armless and another sliced in two, while Sanjuro calmly sheathes his sword. Both Sanjuro and Obi-wan belong to the 'super-Samurai' tradition of *chambara* films, which Kurosawa was lampooning in both *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro*.

Another interesting point is that *Yojimbo* was later remade as a western, albeit a 'spaghetti western' – *A Fistfull of Dollars* – so we come full circle. Indeed, other Japanese Samurai films have been remade as westerns, most notably *Seven Samurai* as *The Magnificent Seven* and *Rashomon* as *The Outrage*.

The plot of *Star Wars*, too, seems to owe something to the Japanese swordplay films. Lucas mentions "*Hidden Fortress*" among the films of his youth that influenced him in making the science fiction epic. Both *Hidden Fortress* and *Star Wars* being with heroic, stirring music under the credits, then depart

from the usual pattern of epics by starting and continuing to tell the story, not through the heroes, but through apparently secondary, lowly characters who squabble and bicker throughout the film. In *Hidden Fortress*, these are the two farmers and in *Star Wars*, the two droids. We follow these characters through the film, and it is they who overreact to each situation and who are emotional, the most human of the characters, and not the heroes. It is they whom we most identify with.

There is also something in *Star Wars* of *Miyamoto Musashi*, that old warhorse of a film that has been remade more times than *Star Trek* has been rerun. The film is based on the life and exploits of the legendary early 17th century swordsman, Masashi Miyamoto. It concerns a young boy, Musashi, who is searching for a master swordsman gone bad who killed his mentor and his father. The story culminates, after many adventures, often over several films, in a great duel between the boy and the swordsman on a lonely beach.

Finally, there is the concept of the Force itself, which is very typical of Oriental philosophy, suggesting the *ch'i* of Neo-Confucianism and the *tao* of Taoism. These philosophies influenced Zen, which originally was the philosophy pursued by the Samurai class and which colored their concepts of martial arts, as anyone who has studied karate or judo would know. It also has a gentler side, giving rise to nothing more violent than the tea ceremony. So in both cases, we have the belief in an energy field permeating all things, binding them into a whole, which is a distinctive philosophy of a warrior class, though not exclusively theirs.

The above observations are simply my own, derived from my knowledge of Japanese Samurai films and TV shows and my studies of the language and people; they make no pretense of scholarly exactitude. They just further illustrate how much of 20th century global culture has gone into the fabric of *Star Wars*, all the different elements and borrowings blended and melted into a unique whole. One reason it is so satisfying is that subconsciously we recognize things made familiar by movies and television, even when they are not from our own particular society and even though these things have been twisted to give them a different science fiction flavor and relevance. Indeed, the film is a case of infinite diversity in infinite combinations, as even the cast, crew, and locations were a potpourri of many nations.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Each issue of *Bantha Tracks*, we'll try to answer some of the most often asked questions about *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. If you have any questions that you'd like to have answered, send them to: Q & A; P.O. Box 8905; Universal City, CA 91608. We don't have room to answer all of the questions we receive, but we'll answer as many as we can in these pages.

Q Where can I write to members of the cast and crew of "Star Wars"?

A For various reasons, we can't give out the addresses of the cast and crew members. However, if you want to write to them, you can address your letter to that person in care of the Official *Star Wars* Fan Club at the address given above. We can't promise an answer, but we can promise that the person you write to will receive the letter.

One thing to remember: if you want to write to more than one person, send separate letters. We have received many letters addressed to *Mark Hamill & Carrie Fisher*, or some other pair of people, and have no way to send the same letter to both of them.

Q Is there any way to get a copy of the script to "Star Wars"?

A This month, Ballantine Books will be publishing a book called *The Art of Star Wars*. The book contains the entire script and hundreds of black & white and color illustrations including preliminary concept drawings, finished production paintings, costume sketches, photographs, and storyboards of action sequences. Also included are reproductions of posters used to

advertise *Star Wars* from around the world; a selection of cartoons, comic strips, and spin-off art; and artwork sent in by some of the film's youngest fans.

Q How many different "miniatures" were built for "Star Wars"?

A According to Grant McCune, Chief Model Maker on *Star Wars*, there were 24 different types of miniatures designed. More than one of some of these were required, so there were over 70 miniatures actually built from the 24 designs.

These included space vehicles, such as the X-Wing Fighters (14 models), Y-Wing Fighters (8 models), and TIE Fighters (20 models); surface vehicles, such as the Jawa's Sand Crawler (1 model) and Luke's Landspeeder (2 models); and detailed sections of the Death Star, such as the trench, the target area, gun towers, and the docking bay.

The scale on the models ranged from 1:8 on the Lifepod and Lifepod Bay to 1:16 for most of the space vehicles to an incredible 1:180,000 for the Death Star (making a full size Death Star 102+ miles in diameter).



Q When will "The Empire Strikes Back" be released?

A The world premiere of the *The Empire Strikes Back* will take place in London, England, on 17 May 1980. The United States premiere will be in Washington D.C. on 18 May 1980. The film will open nationwide in both countries starting on 21 May 1980, and will spread to the rest of the world throughout the summer.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Members who have questions regarding the operation of the Fan Club are encouraged to write to us at the address given on the last page of this newsletter. Every letter that comes in will be read and answered as soon as possible. Please be sure to include your name, address, and Force number whenever you write, and to type or print plainly. Using your Force number helps us to serve you better, and speeds up your receiving an answer.

If you move, please be sure to send us your change of address. Include both your old and new address, along with your Force number. All three of these are necessary for us to change your membership record on our computer.

The mailing label on your copy of *Bantha Tracks* has both your Force number and your membership renewal date on its first line. The date given on your label is the date of the last issue of *Bantha Tracks* you'll receive, unless you renew your membership. We'll provide information on renewing your membership in the next issue.

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